

A Statement about the Destruction of Louvain and Neighborhood

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There have been many stories about the "German atrocities" in Belgium, and recently certain articles have appeared in the Chicago press which are of such a character that they seem to demand particular attention. Those articles come from correspondents of American papers in Germany or accompanying the German army in France and Belgium. They generally represent the treatment given by the German army to the civil population in Belgium as very kind and conclude that everywhere stories about German atrocities "vanish on inquiry."

I have no desire to question the sincerity of those correspondents, but in many respects I know they are mistaken. They were always far away from the places where "atrocities" were committed. One of them was, between August 12 and August 18, in the neighborhood of Landen and of Namur, when atrocities were committed in the eastern part of Belgium; he was staying in Brussels on August 20 and the three following days, watching for the passing of the German troops through the city, when Aerschot and several villages between Louvain and Malines were sacked and destroyed; he was staying in the Belgian town of Binche when Louvain was burned; and he accompanied the German troops in France when the Belgian towns of Dinant, Andenne, and Tarnes were destroyed and their inhabitants killed. In that way, one may assert that he has not *seen* atrocities, but it seems absolutely inconsequent to say that there were not atrocities at all.

As one of those newspaper correspondents has reported the German accusations against the citizens of Louvain, and has made statements about that city which are entirely false, I think the time has come to give here my own account and to publish the truth concerning the occurrences which took place not only at Louvain but also in the villages and small towns of the neighborhood.

I myself am not an eyewitness of all the facts I shall report here, but for each case I give my evidence in such a way that everyone will be able to judge of the value of the statement. I shall not

give the names of my informants in every case, for some of them have their homes still left standing in Belgium or their parents and family and relatives still living in that country. The publication of those informants' names would bring upon the heads of their relatives very disagreeable consequences—remember the arrest of Cardinal Mercier—and for themselves disaster. But the names I have, and I am the repository of their statements, giving my word of honor that those reports are authentic.

THE SACK OF AERSCHOT

On the first of October, 1914, the communal secretary of Aerschot, who escaped the massacre and was a refugee on the Belgian coast at Lombaertzyde, gave the following written statement. I have that statement in my possession. I know the secretary of Aerschot personally and can vouch for the reliability of his report.

The German army arrived before Aerschot on the 19th of August, at six o'clock in the morning. The town was bombarded and surrendered at eight o'clock. The Belgian troops, under command of Officer Gilson, fell back on Louvain. At nine o'clock the Germans entered Aerschot. Immediately, six civilians, M. Bruyninx and his two sons, M. Michiels, M. Iseborghs, M. Chapeauville, were killed while they were crossing the streets. They had not fired a single shot on the entering troops.

In the afternoon, the church was bombarded for two hours, the soldiers firing at the same time on the houses.

It is a fact that the German general, who was standing at that time on the balcony of the burgomaster's house, was killed. The Germans say that he was killed by the son of Burgomaster Tielemans, a boy of sixteen years. The widow of the burgomaster energetically denies that fact in a letter, wherein she says:

About four o'clock in the afternoon my husband was distributing some cigars to the [German] soldiers, standing outside our door. I was with him. Seeing that the general and his aides-de-camp were watching us from the balcony, I advised him to come in. At this moment, looking toward the Grand Place, where more than 2,000 soldiers were encamped, I saw distinctly two puffs of smoke. Firing followed. The Germans were firing toward the houses and breaking into them. My husband, my children, the servants, and myself had just time to rush to the stairs leading to the cellars. The Germans were even firing in the halls of the houses. After a few minutes of great anxiety one of the general's aides-de-camp came down, saying: "The general is dead; where is the burgomaster?" My

husband said to me: "This will be serious for me." As he was stepping forward, I said to the aide-de-camp: "You may see, sir, that my husband did not fire." "Never mind," he answered, "he is responsible." My husband was taken away. . . .

That is the statement of Mme Tielemans. The Germans maintain that the general was shot by the son of the burgomaster. I cannot deny or affirm either story: I was not at Aerschot.

The communal secretary, however, continues his statements, in the following manner, and his testimony can scarcely be utterly disregarded:

[After the death of the general] all the inhabitants of Aerschot were taken prisoners and led, their hands bound behind their backs, outside the town. The burgomaster, his brother, and his son, and a great number of inhabitants were shot.

Here is a letter of M. Séverin Van Maesendonck, one of the inhabitants who was among the men who would have been shot but who escaped:

A few steps from me, hidden under straw, with only their heads free, were lying, with their hands bound behind their backs, our burgomaster, his son, and his brother. . . . I saw one of the soldiers advancing toward the burgomaster and kicking the burgomaster's hat over his eyes, the other soldiers laughing at the joke. From the Stockman's farm, where the officers passed the night, some "leutnants" came. Emile Tielemans, the burgomaster, spoke to one of those officers, saying, "Well, Leutnant Wolff, I think there is a mistake. All those men could be shot as well as us without a word in their defense. You have dined this afternoon at my table, you were staying with me all the time, talking with me at the very moment when your soldiers began to shout: 'They have fired.' Well, you and you alone can be witness to my innocence." Leutnant Wolff replied: "I know it, Monsieur Tielemans, and at the opportune moment, I shall testify in your favor." The officers went back to the farm and discussed our case. After a few minutes, they returned, without Leutnant Wolff, who had, of course, been unsuccessful in his intervention, and was unwilling to be present at the brutal execution of those men.

The burgomaster, his brother, and his son were then shot.

The other men [says the statement of the communal secretary] were then placed in ranks and numbered 1, 2, 3. Every number 3 was taken out and shot; for instance Jacques Vÿs and his three sons, Tuerlinckx, printer, the two brothers Van den Plas, Vanderheyde, communal teacher, Jean Berghe, policeman. Fire was set to all the houses of the town place, The well-to-do ladies of the town were put in the middle of the market place, with their hands up, and ordered to stay in that position from ten

o'clock in the morning until four o'clock in the afternoon. Among them was the widow of the burgomaster. A price of 10,000 marks had been put on her head, but no one betrayed the fact that she was there. . . .

After a few days of terror, during which the remainder of the men, the women, and the children were shut up in the church, without food, the order was given to leave the town. Hundreds of fugitives were chased in the direction of Louvain, followed by German soldiers. Among them was a lame and deaf woman, Mme Haye, pushed in a cart. Her niece, Nelly, aged twenty-eight, was killed because she tried to help her aunt. . . .

When the fugitives, driven by the Germans, arrived at the Place de la Station at Louvain, the soldiers fired a volley at them. Most of the unfortunate people fled. A young woman, aged twenty-five, Mme Bruyninckx-Marien, was killed in the arms of her mother. . . .

Meanwhile other German soldiers continued to loot the houses of Aerschot. There were 1,500 inhabitants. More than 200 were killed, the rest deported. Aerschot is now destroyed and abandoned by its inhabitants.

That is the story of the little town of Aerschot, near Louvain.

THE SACK OF WESPELAER

Regarding the sack of Wespelaer, my informant is the public-school teacher of that wealthy village. His statement was afterward entirely confirmed by a Belgian nobleman, who, too, himself saw the facts, Viscount A——; I shall not give his name in full as his relatives are still in Belgium.

On the evening of the same day, August 19, after the taking of Aerschot, some German lancers entered the village of Wespelaer, near Louvain, a place of 1,500 inhabitants. The Belgian army, in its retreat on Malines and Antwerp, had left a small rearguard in order to protect the retreat. Those soldiers fired at the German lancers, killing five of them, near the east corner of the railway station.

The next day, August 20, German troops advanced on Wespelaer, in order to avenge the dead lancers killed by the Belgian rearguard.

Immediately the Germans set fire to the fruit-canning factory (300 railway cars of 10,000 kilograms each). All the houses of the village were searched and those inhabitants who tried to flee shot in cold blood. Among them were: Emile Pennieckx, aged thirty; Léon Gordts, twenty-seven; Andries François, twenty-eight; Van de venne, Alphonse, and his daughter Mary, aged nineteen; Mme Dierickx, aged seventy, and her daughter, aged thirty; Mertens, Joseph, and his daughter, aged twenty-two.

Sixty houses were burnt, as was too the beautiful château, the country house of a nobleman, the milk factory, the dynamo store of De Coster & Co.

The inhabitants were then assembled in the church and taken as prisoners and driven by the German soldiers in the direction of Thildonek. The burgomaster, M. De Wolf, and the parish priest, Fr. Van Segvelt, marched at the head of the column of prisoners. The priest was compelled to bear a German flag and was kicked by a soldier, who shouted at him: "Nicht zuviel Potz machen und besser marchieren, schwarzer Hund." After a short time the prisoners were joined by other groups of men coming from the villages of Herent, Winxele, Bueken, which had also been devastated.

On the way, Fr. De Clercq, priest of Bueken, who was ill, was attached to a gun; he asked to be killed, as he was unable to bear his torture any longer. At last, near Malines, the prisoners were released.

Meanwhile, the village of Wespelaer was also looted: absolutely everything was taken away or destroyed.

The fate of Wespelaer was also the fate of nearly all the numerous villages lying along a road 20 miles in length between Louvain and Malines. As I think it is time to speak now of the fate of Louvain itself, I will deal no longer with the tortures suffered by the peasants of the neighborhood of Louvain.

THE DESTRUCTION OF LOUVAIN

1. LOUVAIN BEFORE THE ENTERING OF THE GERMANS

I personally was not at Louvain when the town was burned. I left it six days before its destruction. But I was there all the time from the outbreak of the war (August 3) until the entering of the German troops, and I myself saw some things which may perhaps prove interesting.

I had served as civic guard since July 31. The civic guard are not "francs tireurs" (snipers), of course, but troops, wearing a distinctive military uniform, armed with the Mauser rifle, commanded by regular officers appointed by the King. In America one would call them "the militia."

For three weeks I acted as civic guard in the neighborhood of Louvain, for the protection of railway bridges and lines of communication of the Belgian army, and to defend the villages of the neighborhood against the possible attacks of German lancers, who were overrunning our country.

On the night of August 18 we witnessed, from a hill, the burning of Tirlemont, where in the afternoon and the evening a battle

had taken place. Toward eleven o'clock at night, I saw the Belgian troops retreating in excellent order before overwhelming numbers. One of my students, Ch. Van Tieghem, whom I recognized among the passing soldiers, told me that the sudden concentration of artillery fire on the Belgian trenches, quickly discovered by the German aeroplanes, had compelled his battalion to retire in a hurry, after it had fought gallantly for more than five hours. Soon we saw the villages on the road from Tirlemont to Louvain set on fire one after the other and could watch the advance of the enemy. After a short time we fell back on Louvain. We saw then the Belgian army going around the town, leaving Louvain on its left, and retiring quickly in the direction of Malines. Louvain, as an open town, was not to be defended.

So we, men of the civic guard, were all disarmed on the morning of August 19 at a quarter to six o'clock. Each of us threw his rifle, his bayonet, and his 120 bullets into trunks, awaiting this purpose, and all those arms were sent by train to the fortress of Antwerp, upon which the Belgian army was falling back.

We remained a while, unarmed, in the station, until eight o'clock. We were full of despair, but regained hope when a staff officer hurried by with the statement that the French troops were pushing forward, by "*marches forcées*," on Louvain, in order to help our army. Later we heard, however, that the French had come too late and were wheeling rapidly back in the direction of Namur. We assisted, full of despair, at the departure of the Belgian general headquarters, of the scouts, who took with them one single German soldier as prisoner of war—the others had been previously sent to Bruges—a poor-looking fellow, and, at eight o'clock in the morning, after three hours of nervous excitement, we were finally disbanded. At that time not one Belgian soldier was in Louvain. Only a gallant rearguard action was fought at Lovenjoul, near Louvain. The Belgian lancers there charged the advancing enemy: only seven of those heroic lancers came back.

I went to my home, took my wife and my two little babies—one of them only fifteen days old, being born the very day of the declaration of war on Belgium—to the train, and we left Louvain. Two or three miles outside the town, in the direction of Lovenjoul, the roar of the guns thundered. That was the Belgian artillery, protecting the retreat of our troupes.

That is what I witnessed at Louvain. I saw, too, on the first day of the war, all the arms of the inhabitants requisitioned by the burgomaster, according to instructions issued by the Belgian government, and I saw, too, posted on the walls, those proclamations, "whose language," according to one of the American correspondents of a Chicago paper, seemed "often passionate in its solicitude":

AUX CIVILS

Le ministre de l'intérieur recommande aux civils, si l'ennemi se montre dans leur région:

De ne pas combattre;

De ne proférer ni injures ni menaces;

De se tenir à l'intérieur et de fermer les fenêtres afin qu'on ne puisse dire qu'il y a eu provocation;

Si les soldats occupent, pour se défendre, une maison ou un hameau isolé, de l'évacuer, afin qu'on ne puisse dire que les civils ont tiré;

L'acte de violence commis par un seul civil serait un véritable crime, que la loi punit d'arrestation et condamne, car il pourrait servir de prétexte à une répression sanglante, au pillage et au massacre de la population innocente, des femmes et des enfants.

That warning was given both to the Flemish and to the Walloon population and printed, every day, in every Belgian newspaper.

2. THE GERMAN OCCUPATION AT LOUVAIN FROM AUGUST 19 TO AUGUST 25

The statements I make below are not based on my own experience. But there are many of my colleagues, professors of the University of Louvain (nearly 25), in England, many among them victims of brutalities and several of whom escaped a terrible death. We have been together for three months in England. The reliability and honesty of these of my colleagues is beyond question. I have in my possession written statements they have made, statements which anyone may read who is interested. Others told me their story, without writing it. I have the fullest confidence in their statements, as I know that no one of them would assert facts which he had not seen himself.

Here is a statement of Professor Canon Léon Noël, professor of philosophy, who was a victim of the soldiers' brutality. His statement is in my possession.

When the Germans approached Louvain, I decided to stay. I had confidence in the law of nations. I had confidence too, in the German

discipline. I had been in Germany and—why not acknowledge it?—had brought from there a sincere, sympathetic feeling toward the German people and a deep admiration for German organization. I thought it impossible that the occupation of Louvain by the German army could be accompanied by trouble, and I refused to believe the tales of atrocities committed at Moulain, Argenteau, Visé, or Aerschot.

The Germans entered Louvain on the 19th of August. The Belgian troops which covered us fell back owing to the overwhelming numbers of the enemy. At the very moment the battle neared the town, the artillery of the Belgians ceased firing, in order to avoid fighting within the town. Some hours later, the German army marched through our streets, with fifes and drums, singing "*Die Wacht am Rhein.*" No incident, no provocation. Many inhabitants had left the town. Those who remained had only one idea: to prevent any act of hostility which could bring upon them punishment. The burgomaster of Louvain had, by way of proclamations, asked the population to stay quiet, insisting on the fact that the army alone had the right to fight the enemy. According to the instructions of the Belgian government, he had disbanded the civic guard and disarmed the members of that body. The arms of the inhabitants had been twice requisitioned since the first day of the war; the German commander requisitioned them a third time. I saw one of my friends hastily carrying [to the town hall] an old hunting rifle, and another so scrupulous as to deliver native arms brought back from the Congo.

On the evening of the 19th, some regiments were quartered for the night in private houses. I want to state that, in my home, things happened quite well and I had, of course, with one of my German guests, a very interesting talk about the war: he expected to finish the war quickly in France in order to attack Russia after that. In other homes of Louvain, matters did not go so well. I saw on the following morning houses which had been entirely sacked. One of them belonged to a University professor. The owner of another had spent the night in the hospital, taking care of the wounded soldiers. In those houses, not only had the cellar been looted, but the art works had been destroyed, and the furniture soiled in an unspeakable manner, the books and papers torn, the scientific apparatus badly damaged. In other houses, occupied only by women, the Germans conducted themselves in a very uncouth manner.

For a whole week we saw the German army passing through the streets, and requisition followed upon requisition. . . . Enormous quantities of supplies were ordered every day. The commissariat of the German army had gathered such a number of cattle that it exceeded the needs of the army. But, as all the cattle had been slain at once, what remained could not be used for the food of the civilians and was left to rot. Looting and brutality went on apace. I saw myself at the hospital a young girl of the neighborhood. She had been taken away by the soldiers in the presence of her parents. She was first violated and then stabbed twice with bayonets.

The inhabitants suffered all those things calmly. The German officer in command had also taken hostages: the burgomaster, the aldermen, the rector of the University, the dean of St. Peter.

3. THE INHABITANTS OF LOUVAIN THANKED BY MAJOR VON MANTEUFFEL

On the morning of the 25th of August, the German commander, Major von Manteuffel, by means of affiches, congratulated the inhabitants of the town for their irreproachable attitude and announced that the hostages should be released. We did not foresee what would happen some hours after.

4. THE BEGINNING OF THE DESTRUCTION AS IT APPEARED TO AN EYEWITNESS

During the day of August 25 [continues the statement of Professor Noël] we heard the roar of the guns in the direction of Malines. Toward evening the roar came nearer and nearer. Troops were sent in a hurry out of the town, in the direction of the battle. At eight o'clock in the evening, just as I was finishing my dinner, I heard in the street fierce firing. Soon a continuous crackling indicated the firing of a machine-gun. The bullets hit the walls of my house. We fled into a room near the garden. Soon we saw the flames breaking out everywhere. The firing stopped, then began again, at intervals, first nearer, then farther away.

From a room of the upper floor, I saw German soldiers passing in the street. One of them, quite calmly, fired a shot in the air with his rifle. I noted the particular sound of those German shots: at different times I recognized them when, during the next two days, as it was related, the citizens of Louvain were supposed to be fighting in the streets against the Germans.

But, at that moment, I did not understand anything about what was happening. I state only that the rooms I went through were pierced by a hail of bullets. Those, surely, had not been fired in the air. . . . I saw, too, through the windows, that the burning was coming nearer and nearer. Hastily I put together some needed articles and bade my relatives flee . . . just in time, for the machine-guns came back and the bullets fell again on my house. Then the aggressors left again. We waited all night, till day-break. Then the firing began again. Daylight showed the town under a veil of black smoke and in a dead silence. At length doors opened; neighbors talked together. Some houses had put up the white flag. Some citizens were coming out, a white handkerchief in their hand. They met German patrols who stopped them, searched them, ordered them to hold their hands up every five steps. Those citizens came back and told what happened. The Germans said the inhabitants had fired at their troops. Where? How? No precise fact could be stated in reply.

In such a way began the destruction of Louvain, on August 25, about eight o'clock in the evening.

5. THE REASON FOR THE DESTRUCTION

We see, in Professor Noël's statement, that the Germans say the inhabitants of Louvain fired at their troops. Afterward, the official explanation given by Germany repeated those charges and the article recently published in a Chicago paper echoed those accusations.

Professor Noël states that he heard the first shots being fired about eight o'clock in the evening. All my other colleagues at Louvain are agreed concerning that statement. They, too, heard the first shots fired about eight o'clock, some of them in other parts of the city, at an earlier hour, about 7:35 or 7:45 P.M.

Well, everyone who was at Louvain during the German occupation knows that, after seven o'clock in the evening, all the inhabitants had to stay inside their homes and that if anyone was found on the streets after that time, he was arrested. Then, after seven o'clock, all the windows had to be closed, and, in some streets, a light was to be kept in the windows all night.

As the first shots were fired about 7:35 P.M., at a time when, owing to the very strict German rule, every citizen had to stay inside his house, one can hardly believe that civilians began attacking the Germans in the street.

But, did the civilians perhaps fire from their windows? That, too, has been asserted. None of my colleagues were in the streets of Louvain that evening; they can neither deny nor affirm the fact that civilians were firing from their windows.

But Professor B——, who speaks German quite well, on the early morning of the 26th of August, left his house and walked along the Mont du Collège, to the Rue de Namur. There he saw the Library of the University burning fiercely, and at six o'clock in the morning the roof of the Library collapsed. The next day, on the morning of the 27th, he was able to speak to a German sentry, on the Vieux Marché, in front of the destroyed Library. He asked him in German what had really happened on the evening of the 25th. The German soldier replied: *Man hat uns alarmirt gegen 7 oder 7½ Uhr. Unsere Truppe sind abgezogen, und da wir nur wenige ueberblieben, so haben die Civielen auf uns geschossen.* ("An alarm was given about 7:00 or 7:30 o'clock. Our troops had left the town and, as only a few of us remained, the civilians fired on us.")

Indeed, on the 25th, as we read in the statement of Professor Noël, in the afternoon troops were sent in a hurry out of the town, as there was a battle not far from Louvain, in the direction of Malines. Only a few soldiers remained as a garrison in Louvain, after those troops had left. According to the German soldier to whom Professor B—— spoke, those remaining were suddenly attacked by the inhabitants. The attack about which the German soldier talked with Professor B—— took place, the German said, on the Vieux Marché. Well, on the Vieux Marché there are only stores, drug-stores, groceries, bakeries, fruit shops, etc. When, between August 19 and August 25, some German troops were quartered in the middle of the Vieux Marché (a market), the crowd was busily engaged in trade there. On those days Professor B—— saw women and children issuing out of the stores and shops on each side of the market, selling cigars, cakes, bread, beer, fruits, etc., to the soldiers. A woman said to Professor B——: "I'm glad to get this opportunity; as we shall not have our 'Kermesse' [local feast] this year, the presence of those soldiers will bring us a lot of money."

I can hardly imagine that under these conditions the people dwelling on the Vieux Marché really did fire from their windows at the German soldiers in the market.

Pursuing his questions further, Professor B—— asked the German soldier: "Where did they fire from?" The German showed the blackened walls of the University Library! That building had been unoccupied since the outbreak of the war; no officer was left there, and the mediaeval, heavy doors were locked and barred. I saw the building before I left Louvain, and it was well closed as it is every year in vacation time.

In view of all this, can anyone declare that the inhabitants fired from the windows of the Library, a building which most of them, and most assuredly the grocers and fruit merchants of the Vieux Marché, had never entered in their lives?

The German soldier to whom Professor B—— spoke said that the Germans "had been alarmed" at 7:00 or 7:30 P.M.; that troops were sent to the battle that was then raging between Malines and Louvain, and that only a few soldiers were left. As the time when the first shots were heard is given by some of my colleagues as being 7:35 P.M., one might conclude that, at the time indicated by the German sentry, the remaining troops really were attacked. But

Professor B—— and others assert positively that troops were sent out to the battle before 6:00 P.M., and not at 7:00 or 7:30 P.M. Why should the inhabitants not have attacked between 6:00 P.M. and 8:00 P.M., before the other troops returned to the town?

Professor B—— also found the opportunity to talk with another German sentry, on one of the boulevards of Louvain, on the morning of Thursday, August 28. On that boulevard he saw the house of one of his relatives nearly destroyed by shrapnel. He asked the German soldier why the Germans had destroyed that house. *Das ist nicht absichtlich gemacht, da wohnten gute Leute* ("That was not done intentionally; good people lived there"), replied the soldier; *aber daher hat man auf uns geschossen* ("but from that house they fired at us"), and he pointed to a house on the corner of the boulevard. Here, for the second time, we have a precise charge. Well, the house indicated by the German sentry was occupied by a man and a woman aged nearly seventy years. I know them and can assert that they are absolutely unable to carry a gun and to fire from their windows.

On the same morning of the 28th, Professor B—— talked further with a third German soldier, on another boulevard. He questioned again, in German: "What happened on the 25th?" and again the reply came: *Man hat auf uns geschossen*, followed, however, by this remark: *Unschuldigen zahlen mit den Schuldigen* ("Innocent people pay as well as the guilty"). To the inquiry of Professor B—— as to where the inhabitants fired from, the sentry pointed at the house of one of Professor B——'s relatives. Professor B—— replied: *Das ist kaum möglich* ("that is scarcely possible"), for he knew that the relative in question had left Louvain before the entry of the Germans. The German replied: *Vielleicht daneben* ("Perhaps they fired from the next house"). The next house, too, had been vacated by its occupants before the occupation of the town.

The authenticity of those statements is vouched for by Professor Jacques Thoreau, professor of mineralogy. Those are the only statements I have which give precise charges from the German side, made by soldiers who had not learned a lesson prepared by their officers, but who were speaking in a quite natural and unprepared manner. I have no statements covering other points of the town, and so I can neither affirm nor deny that in other places no one had fired. But the three examples given above seem to me to throw

a very singular light on the value of precise accusations against the citizens of Louvain.

I have, however, on the other side, very important statements, which are of such a character that they ought to be carefully examined.

One of my colleagues, Professor Léon Verhelst, states the following extraordinary fact. On the evening of August 25, when the burning began, he was at home; he had just finished supper when, at about 8:15 P.M., two German soldiers rang his doorbell. He opened the door himself. Without saying a word, the two soldiers rushed up to the second floor and fired several shots into the air through the window. The professor was so astonished that he left the door open. Some other German soldiers rushed at him, pretending that he had shot at them through the window. They fired three times at him, fortunately without result. He ran and locked himself in his cellar, out of which he managed to escape when his house, which had been set on fire, threatened to fall in ruins above his head.

An incident of like character—with this difference, that here the shots were fired in front of the house—was observed by another of our professors, on the next morning, at 7:35 o'clock. It should be borne in mind that Professor Noël, in his statement given above, asserts that he saw a German soldier, passing with others in front of his house, coolly firing a shot in the air.

Here then are three separate statements, proving that the German soldiers themselves fired shots in the air, in the streets of Louvain, at a time when, as it was said, they were attacked by the civilians in the streets.

What is then the reason for the destruction of Louvain? Nobody knows; but here is an explanation, given by all my colleagues unanimously—an explanation that may be read in connection with the facts I have stated above. On the afternoon of the 25th of August, the inhabitants of Louvain heard the thunder of the guns in the direction of Malines (nearly 20 miles from Louvain). The Belgian army, making a sortie out of the first ring of the Antwerp fortifications, attacked the Germans at Malines, hurling them back in the direction of Brussels and in the direction of Louvain. The German commander at Louvain sent support from the town. The battle raged until the evening, and the troops left in Louvain, as well as the inhabitants, could hear the sound of the guns coming

nearer and nearer. The sound of the Belgian guns, quite different from those of the German, was easy to be recognized. In the evening, toward 7:30 o'clock, the German troops were hurled back by the Belgians nearly to the gates of Louvain. They entered the town completely routed and disbanded. Enraged, they fired on the houses. At those shots, the soldiers left in the town rushed by, thinking that the enemy had entered the town.¹ Between the two bodies of German troops a struggle took place in the darkness. They fired each on the other. After a few minutes, they recognized their mistake, but some sixty Germans had fallen on both sides. In order to cover their blunder, the soldiers shouted that the civilians had fired on them, and the destruction of the town began.

That is the explanation opposed to all German official denials.

6. THE EVENTS OF THE NIGHT OF AUGUST 25

Immediately the German troops rushed in all directions and began to set fire to the houses.

In the Rue de la Station [says the statement of Professor Noël partly reproduced above], the Boulevard de Tirlemont, the Chaussée de Tirlemont, and elsewhere also, many houses were burned. The inhabitants who tried to flee were shot down by rifle fire in the streets, like rabbits. I heard later that many dead bodies had been found in the cellars of the destroyed houses.

Mme Nicaud, a well-to-do woman of Louvain, wife of a commandant of the 5th Belgian artillery, states that in the Rue de la Station, in nearly every house, the inhabitants were called to their doors and there at once shot with revolvers. She saw at least fifty men shot. One of my friends, M. Van Ertryck, died in that manner. A wealthy citizen, M. David, in whose house German officers had taken dinner, was taken out and shot at his own door, whereupon his magnificent home was immediately looted. M. David was aged eighty-four. In the other main streets, Rue Léopold, Rue de Diest, Grand Place, Rue de Namur, etc., similar events took place. Every man who had a knife on his person larger than a small penknife, or who was slow in putting up his hands, or failed to understand an order, was shot out of hand.

¹A proof of the fact that that really was the idea of the Germans left in Louvain is found in the following circumstances. At the first shots fired, an officer and three soldiers rushed to the delicatessen store at the corner of one of the main streets and asked to be hidden in the cellar, "as the Belgians surprised Louvain." This was told to me by Mlle D——, the owner of the store.

During the night and on the following morning (August 26) the burning continued. Soon the central building of the University and the Cathedral of St. Peter were burning. Professor B—— saw the roof of the Cathedral set on fire with hand grenades, and the splendid church was soon fiercely burning. Mme Nicaud states that numbers of the inhabitants, who had escaped to the station, were there arrested by the German soldiers, the men being separated from the women and the children. Many of the men were conducted to the corner of the Boulevard de Tirlemont and of the Rue Marie Thérèse and immediately shot. The women were gathered, six hundred of them together, states Mme Nicaud, in a waiting-room at the station. After that they were compelled to march and to counter-march. Among them were women of over seventy years of age and sick and invalid persons. One woman was delivered of a child on the road.

7. THE EVENTS OF WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 26

What happened on the next morning is stated by Professor Noël, who continues his report thus:

The Germans arrested groups of men and compelled them to walk in front of them, hands up, until the Belgian troops were encountered. Then, as the battle [at Malines] had ceased, those men were released. I met three University professors who were prisoners in one of those groups. All three had lived in Germany and had professed an unreserved admiration for *deutsche Kultur* and *deutsche Wissenschaft*. One of them was extremely agitated. Before he was arrested, fire was set to his house, where his old father, a man of more than eighty years of age, had been ill for many months. He saw four German soldiers putting the old man on a mattress and throwing him into the garden, in the middle of the night. The old man, one of the most conspicuous artistic and literary personalities of Belgium, was found by me later dying on a hospital bed. I met, too, the young wife of one of my colleagues, who is a soldier in the army. Her baby was six days old; bullets were raining upon her bed. She, too, was carried to the hospital.

It was here, at the hospital, that we were compelled to seek refuge with hundreds of other families, for the Germans were again burning the houses and killing the people in my street. With my mother and our servants, I left my house. Threatening soldiers came nearer and we were compelled to flee. A maid-servant who went back to my house to find some things she had forgotten was ill treated. The soldiers were asking for me; they said that I had fired upon the Germans. The proofs of it were their own bullets which they had fired through the windows and the walls of my house. I, myself, on our way to the hospital, was arrested by a patrol, but at the

corner of the street I escaped. We thus passed the night of the 26th of August at the hospital. We heard the firing starting again at different times and on all sides of the town we saw the raging flames.

8. THE FATE OF A CIVIC GUARD

While Professor Noël and other families took refuge in the hospital, other things happened to other inhabitants of the town.

For the following statement I am indebted to an officer of our University, closely connected with our Library; he was himself a victim. He lived with me for three months in England and is still in that country. His name and reliability are well known to Dr. F. Jameson, director of the historical department of the Carnegie Institution at Washington, and to two of my former pupils, M. F. Zwierlein, professor at Rochester, New York, and M. P. Guilday, professor in the Catholic University of America at Washington.

Here is the statement of that eyewitness, in his own words:

On the morning of August 26 some German soldiers with drums, accompanied by a disarmed policeman, went through the streets. The policeman announced to the population that all the men of the former civic guard were required to meet at the St. Martin's barracks, in order to do service in the town, especially, it was added, in order to quench the flames.¹ As the severest punishment was threatened to those who would not come, I went to the barracks. In the Rue de Namur, I was looking at the destroyed Library, when at once the firing of the German machine-guns started again in the streets. I ran to the barracks in the Rue de Namur and asked a German officer to give me a written statement in order to excuse my late arrival at the St. Martin's barracks, where we were ordered to be at 2:00 P.M. When the firing had ceased, I left the barracks of the Rue de Namur and went, with a lot of comrades of the former civic guard, to the St. Martin's barracks. But, on our way, in the Grand Place, we were stopped by German soldiers. In the Grand Place I found a great number of former members of the civic guard and other inhabitants too, collected on the spot, in front of the town hall. What a terrible sight! The whole Grand Place was covered with iron pots, filled with incendiary materials, and the fine church of St. Peter was burning. The soldiers asked us if we did not admire that *schönes Schauspiel* ("fine scene"). At once we were surrounded by a lot of drunken soldiers, who looked more like savages. They kicked us and pulled us in

¹ That order was a comedy, according to Professor B——. He saw a German soldier sprinkling water on a burning house of the Vieux Marché in front of the Library. When Professor B—— came in the Rue de Paris, at the rear of that house, he saw German soldiers setting fire to two adjoining houses with hand grenades. So, while the bystanders were induced to believe that some soldiers were trying to quench the flames on the Vieux Marché, in the next street other houses were deliberately set on fire.

all directions. They took off all the red cross badges on the men acting as "infirmiers." The officers were very busy protecting us against the excited soldiers, who threatened us with their bayonets and aimed their rifles at us. From most of us the soldiers took our money, watches, and valuables, and shouting at us all the time *Schweinhunde, grosse Schweine*, etc. Then many heavily loaded carts arrived. The soldiers took off their "havre-sacs" and compelled us to bear them ourselves. For an half hour we were compelled to push the heavy carts through the Rue de Bruxelles. On the right and on the left were soldiers who, advancing, discharged their rifles all the time at the houses on each side of the street. Above our heads there was a continuous crossing of bullets. Two of us were so frightened that they fell. They were killed.

On the way, in the Rue de Bruxelles, all the people met by the soldiers, women and men, were made prisoners and compelled to accompany us. I shall never forget the cries of a crippled woman who was obliged to follow us for a time. Finally she fell on the sidewalk and was allowed to rest.

After half an hour of pushing the carts, we came to an open field, outside the Porte de Bruxelles. Here several thousand German soldiers were encamped. As soon as they saw us, they began to shout: "No mercy! Kill them all!" We were then obliged to kneel down, two by two, and the soldiers told us we were going to be shot. Meanwhile a Jesuit father had blessed us and given us absolution, as we were all convinced that we had to die. After a quarter of an hour, we were allowed to stand up and were again compelled to push the carts over very rough country land. We were all suffering from the warm weather, but did not receive a drop of water. All the time the soldiers struck us with the butt-ends of their rifles. We next arrived at a second German camp. Here one of us was taken out, charged with having thrown a bomb in the Rue de Bruxelles. The man denied it energetically. He was, without trial, condemned to death. The Germans compelled him first to dig his own grave and then he was shot.

After that we were ordered to proceed, four by four. The Jesuit father and the women were released. We thought the Germans would send us back to Louvain. But, on the contrary, we were compelled to walk in the direction of Malines, on the Chaussée de Malines. All the houses along that highroad, several miles long, as far as we could see, were fiercely burning. We marched for more than an hour between that sea of flames, raging on each side of the road. After that we came to an open field near the village of Winxele. There we were compelled to lie down and we were bound by ropes. A heavy rain was then falling, and we were wet through all night. The field was transformed into a mud hole. There we were lying until five o'clock the next morning. It was then Thursday, the 27th of August. At 7:30 A.M. we were again placed in ranks, and marched off, in the rain, surrounded by the soldiers, in the direction of the village of Campenhout. When we passed German troops on the way, those troops shouted at us and threatened us. At Campenhout, we were all—150 of us—shut up in a stable with our clothes saturated with rain, while a sentry was placed at the door.

An officer came to tell us that among us there were people who had fired at the German soldiers and that, if we betrayed the guilty, we should all be released at once. We knew that none of us fired, and preferred to die rather than to charge innocent people. After two hours, the officer came back, with some fifty soldiers, each of them bearing digging tools. Terror fell on us we thought we should be compelled to dig our own graves and should all be shot afterward. Fortunately, there was no longer question of betraying the "guilty" among us. We were marched off to another field, and compelled to dig up all the potatoes. After that, the potatoes were prepared and each of us received 3 of them as our dinner. It was the first food we had had in twenty-four hours. After the "dinner," we were compelled to dig trenches for the German army until evening. At about 6:30 P.M. we saw the German guns beginning the bombardment of Malines. The soldiers laughed at us, saying that they were going to send us some of those bombs. I was so frightened that I could scarcely move.

Meanwhile, all the men of Campenhout and surrounding neighborhood had been arrested and joined us. At 8:00 P.M. we were all shut up in the church of Campenhout, together with the vicar and a seminarist of that parish. We were compelled to face in the direction of the altar and we were strictly forbidden to move.

On the following morning, August 28, we were all searched in order to see whether we had any military medals and whether there were not Belgian soldiers among us. Without food we were then marched off in the direction of Louvain, going four by four. It was a march of 15 miles. We were told that if one of us should try to escape, the others would be killed. At the head of our column marched as hostages, the vicar and the seminarist of Campenhout and two wealthy citizens of Louvain. If a shot was fired on the way, those hostages would be killed. It was exceedingly warm. The soldiers were drinking all the time, without giving us a drop of water. Passing through Bueken, the soldiers pointed at the dead and completely nude body of a woman, charred by fire, and lying in front of the ruins of her house. Everywhere on the way the soldiers showed us with particular pleasure the dead bodies of civilians, which had lain there unburied for three days.

When we entered Louvain, we were joined by a crowd of people who had been gathered from all directions, men, women, children, aged and crippled people. We passed through the Place de la Station and the Rue de la Station, both practically entirely destroyed. On the corner of the Rue Minckelers, we saw on the sidewalk the dead body of a well-dressed man who had been shot. This body was half-burned. I have seen nearly twenty dead bodies of civilians, many of them lying in a position that indicated they were shot while trying to escape. Some of them, particularly a workman, had their hands bound behind their backs.

After having crossed the Rue du Canal, we were all shut up in the "Manège" (practice riding school), where for eight days the Germans had lodged. The "Manège" was filled with rotting straw and the odor was

awful. There we were shut up for the night, some 2,000 men, women, and children together. As there was lack of room, we were unable to move, and there was no opportunity for eating, drinking, or sleeping. That night two poor little babies died and a woman went insane, screaming in a most shocking manner. To the children, however, the German soldiers distributed some "delicatessen," taken from the stores of the town. In the corner of the building were sitting some English soldiers, taken prisoners at the battle of Mons. They were well treated.

The next morning, Saturday, August 29, the German officers announced a lot of "news" from the war: they told of the victories in France and Belgium, the [supposed] fall of Antwerp, the flight of King Albert, and finished by declaring that peace had been signed between Belgium and Germany and that we all would be allowed to return to our homes.

Four by four, we walked out of the "Manège," surrounded by German soldiers. They took us in the direction of the Malines road. There we had to sit down for four hours amid the ruins of the burned houses and the dead bodies of the murdered inhabitants.

Meanwhile, all the old men, women, and children had been released. Only the young men and the priests, some three hundred, had to remain: they were told they would be sent to Germany. At 5:00 P.M. we were again marched off. From time to time we were compelled to run, and those who were unable to do so were struck with rifles: the priests were stabbed with the points of the bayonets.

Soon it became clear that we were not going to be sent to Germany, but to Malines. At ten o'clock in the evening we came to the bridge of Campenhout. The Germans thought the Belgian troops must be in the neighborhood of Malines. They decided to get information, using us as a shield. We were driven in the direction where the Belgian outposts were supposed to be, followed by the Germans, to the village of Boort-Meerbeek. There an order was given to continue our march. The Belgians in front of us would certainly, in the darkness, take us for German troops coming from Louvain and fire at us.

Finally liberated, we marched to Malines. Approaching the Belgian outposts in the night, we shouted: "Don't fire, we are Belgian civilians." Nevertheless, fearing a German trick, the Belgian sentries fired. Fortunately nobody was hit. We ran to the edges of the road and remained there until a priest, with great courage, walked alone to the lines of the Belgian outposts and explained the case.

On Sunday, August 30, after four days of suffering, we reached the village of Waelhem at 3:30 o'clock in the morning, where we received aid from the Belgian soldiers.

This was the statement of the officer of our University when I saw him, a few days after, as a refugee near Ghent. I scarcely recognized him: he looked like a bandit, unshaven, with tired face, tattered clothes, and his feet swollen and bleeding. He could

scarcely walk. He is a scientifically educated man, not at all inclined to exaggeration, and, as I said, his reliability is well known to those American scholars I named above.

9. THE EVENTS OF THURSDAY, AUGUST 28

According to the statement of Professor Noël, the events on Thursday, August 28, were as follows:

On the morning of the 28th, new danger. The Germans announced that the city was to be razed to the ground by guns¹ placed for the purpose outside the town, at "Tivoli," near the railway bridge, and that the whole population would have to leave the town at once. After many orders and counter-orders, we had to go in the direction of Tirlemont, accompanied by soldiers who aimed their rifles at us all the time. When we reached the main road to Tirlemont, we saw it crowded with fugitives for miles and miles. Among them were sick and crippled people. Most of the ladies from the best families of Louvain were walking on the road without shoes or hats. Along the road, where once many villages had stood, all had been destroyed, except three houses.

Meanwhile, at some distance from Louvain, we went through a German camp. I was still wearing my cassock of Catholic priest. Soldiers ran at me, insulted me, and with fierce brutality took me to a little pigpen, standing on the edge of the road. I found there in that dirty pen twenty priests of Louvain who had been arrested. A non-commissioned officer told us that we were going to be shot, as we had stirred up the population to rise against the Germans. My mother, filled with terror, succeeded in finding an officer. That officer questioned me: "*You are suspected [Sie sind vermüdet]* of having stirred up the population." I replied: "I am a professor of the University. I know only my students in Louvain. All are absent from the town. I have relations, however, with many professors of your German universities. I think they will be much surprised to hear how I have been treated. Well, do with me what you wish." The officer considered for a moment and then ordered me to be released. This order was not well received and, a little farther on, they tried again to arrest me. At last I succeeded in exchanging my cassock for civilian clothes. Then, first afoot, afterward in a peasant cart, we reached, after three days, the Dutch town of Maestricht.

Another of my colleagues, Professor J. Havet, of the faculty of medicine, who, too, was compelled to march, with his children, in the direction of Tirlemont, states:

We marched for eight hours on the road to Tirlemont, together with 20,000 fugitives. The soldiers searched us, taking all valuables, money, watches, jewels, etc., and arresting the priests.

¹ That bombardment was not carried out, thanks to the intervention of the burgo-master, one of our University professors.

It is a fact that the priests, especially, were ill treated. On other roads outside the town, on which the inhabitants were driven, arrests of priests occurred. On the Louvain-Tervueren road, the following crime was committed. My informants are all my colleagues now staying in England. They heard the story told by one of our professors who was on the spot, held as a hostage, when the facts happened.

When the inhabitants were driven out of the town, a number of them walked in the direction of Tervueren. Among them were many Jesuit fathers of the theological seminary maintained by the Jesuits at Louvain. Those Jesuit fathers, twenty of them, were arrested, taken as hostages, and thrown into carts filled with sacks. Before entering Brussels, close by the Colonial Museum of Tervueren, the Jesuits were searched. On one of them, a young priest, Fr. Duperriex, was found a small diary containing notes on the events of the war. On one of the sheets of that diary, Fr. Duperriex stated:

When, in previous times, I read that the Huns of Attila destroyed entire cities and that the Arabs burned the library of Alexandria, I smiled. Now I don't smile any more, as I have seen the Germans setting fire to the University Library and the church of Louvain.

When the Germans read those words, they immediately took Fr. Duperriex out of the cart and told him he was to be shot for propagating sedition against the German army. The other Jesuit fathers were made to form a semicircle to witness the slaughter of their colleague.

A white cross in chalk was marked on his cassock over his heart. The soldiers aimed at him, fired, and the priest fell dead. Among those who witnessed the execution was Monsignor Willemssen, former president of the American College at Louvain, who had just come from Rome and had been staying in Louvain for a time. The other Jesuit fathers were then taken to Brussels. The American minister in Brussels, on hearing of these priests being made hostages, immediately asked the German authorities for their release. That was conceded, and the Jesuits were sent to the College of St. Michel, on the outskirts of Brussels.

10. WHAT WAS DESTROYED AT LOUVAIN

After the inhabitants had been driven out of the town, on Thursday, August 28, the soldiers continued sacking, looting, and burning

the houses until September 2. The American public has been told that only one-seventh of Louvain was destroyed. I have in my possession the official list of the burned houses, with the indication of the streets and the number of the houses. I know Louvain, I think, and Cardinal Mercier, who was professor of philosophy at our University for many years, knows the town, too. I agree with him in his statement in his famous pastoral letter:

At Louvain the third part of the buildings are down: 1,074 dwellings have disappeared; on the town land and in the suburbs 1,823 houses have been burned.

It has been said, too, that the Hôtel de Ville (Town Hall), a gem of architecture, was saved from burning by the German officers, who were shot in the back by civilians while doing that heroic work. The Town Hall had not to be saved, as it was not at all threatened by fire. The Town Hall was not set on fire for one simple reason: the German commander had quite comfortably established his headquarters in the Town Hall itself. So the German officers never got the opportunity to save the Hôtel de Ville while being shot in the back by civilians.

It has been stated, too, by correspondents of Chicago newspapers, that the choir stalls, the paintings, and the silver ornaments of St. Peter's Church were removed by German officers and intrusted to the present burgomaster of Louvain, who in turn deposited them in the Hôtel de Ville across the way. The choir stalls of St. Peter were not removed. They could not be removed: they are too heavy. And a picture taken after the destruction shows that they are still on the spot. As for the paintings, the present burgomaster of Louvain, who is a professor of our University, went straight to the choir, after the burning of the church, to see whether the two Van der Weydens and the Thierry Bouts had been burned. He discovered them well packed up and ready to be conveyed to the station, straight to Germany.

It has been said that the great buildings of the University of Louvain are not destroyed and that only the Library was damaged or destroyed. That is partly true. The buildings of the University are scattered all over the town and nearly all escaped destruction. Until a few days ago I thought that only one building was destroyed, the central building containing the Library,

but I recently received information that the Consular and Commercial School of the University has been destroyed, in the Rue du Canal.

The central building of the University was the old Gothic Cloth Hall of Louvain, dating from 1317. That building included the examination hall, the rooms of the staff, the archives of the University, with a contemporary picture of Pope Adrian VI, a fine piece of work, and our magnificent Library with its 920 manuscripts—among them many of the twelfth century and a holograph of the famous Thomas à Kempis—its more than 200,000 books,¹ its 380 incunabulas, its collection of seals, its numismatic collection, its museum of art, including the contemporary portraits of such men as Juste Lipse, Erycius Puteanus, etc. It contained, too, the libraries of many of our scientific students' clubs, which our poor students had bought, year by year, with their own money. Not one book, not one leaflet, not one manuscript was saved during the fire,² as, according to a statement of Professor B——, who went four times to the spot, nobody was allowed to approach the burning Library. Our librarian, Professor P. Delannoy, went, some days after the destruction, to the spot and found nothing but heaps of ashes. Only four walls and some columns are left. The Consular and Commercial School of the University contained the lecture-rooms of that department, valuable scientific collections, a museum of geography, etc.

Besides the 1,074 houses and the two University buildings mentioned, there were also destroyed the Academy of Fine Arts (the Old Collegium Drieux, of the University, sixteenth century), the "Caserne des Dames Blanches" (military barracks), the municipal opera house, the old Collegium Leodiense, of the University (seventeenth century), the Court of Justice (the old Collegium Yvonis, of the University [sixteenth century]), the "Table Ronde" (a private club of large size), and the collegial church of St. Peter was badly damaged, "to an extent which will never permit of its recovering its former splendor."

¹ The German *Minerva*, *Jahrbuch für die gelehrte Welt*, gives the number of 230,000 books.

² Some of our professors received information that the most important books and manuscripts were taken away by the Germans, as a gift for the German libraries, before they set fire to the Library. I myself don't know anything about that, as I was not on the spot.

That is the history of the destruction of Louvain in Belgium. I don't know how many civilians were killed. I heard of 1,600, but I have no exact information. The only thing I know is that up to the 8th of September, 42 dead bodies were found in the ruins of the houses, that, at the end of January, 29 dead bodies were found in the park in front of the station, where they had been hurriedly buried, and that two of our professors, M. Ponthière, professor of engineering, and M. Lenertz, professor of the technical schools, were killed. I don't know how many men were shot between the 25th and the 28th of August.

The destruction of Termonde, Dinant, Andenne, Tamines, Roulers was carried out in the same manner as at Louvain, according to the documents published by the Belgian commission of inquiry. For Tamines, I have the list of the 348 civilian victims (surname and Christian name), which, according to my friend, Mr. L——, one of the men who could escape, were mowed down by a machine-gun and then stabbed by bayonets. Among them were 21 young men between fifteen and nineteen years of age and 11 women. A man who knows much about the massacre of Tamines is the German Baron Lievin von Loé, who has his residence at Bonn, who has interests in the coal mine of Tamines, and who went to the spot. As to the other towns I have no personal evidence. I think that, in the future, no right-minded American will venture again to state that the "atrocities" in Belgium are "a myth" or "vanish on inquiry." In such a case, every man will have the right to cry:

"REMEMBER LOUVAIN!"



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